



December 2017

Thank you for your ongoing interest in the Central Highlands Regional Partnership, and in our 2017 Regional Assembly, which took place in Creswick on 31 August 2017.

At that meeting, which was attended by around 250 people, I pledged to keep all in the room, and those who had expressed interest in the Partnership, up to date with developments and abreast of time lines.

With that in mind, I am taking this opportunity to write to you as Chair of the Central Highlands Regional Partnership.

The 2017 Assembly in summary

The 2017 Central Highlands Regional Assembly was a major part of the ongoing consultation the Partnership has been undertaking right across the Central Highlands region.

Not only did we have a wealth of local residents, businesses and organisation representatives in the room, our Assembly was also attended by two Victorian Government Ministers; the Minister for Regional Development Jaala Pulford and Minister for Planning Richard Wynne. Also present were local Members, Sharon Knight, Geoff Howard and Mary-Ann Thomas. Minister Pulford reinforced that she and other Ministers were in Creswick to listen to regional voices and to hear about our vision for the future of our region.

While the 2016 Assembly was a first chance to explore priorities for the region, 2017 gave us the chance to explore issues deeper and in more detail. Discussions at the 2017 Central Highlands Assembly were structured around seven key themes: Health, Environment and Energy, Education, Transport, Digital Connectivity, Economic Development and Social Welfare.

We wanted to gain an insight from young people in our region and hosted a specific Youth Forum as part of the broader Assembly. A link to the views of younger participants can be found here: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/central-highlands>

The evening was full of conversation and interesting discussion, and generated many ideas which the Partnership will filter and review. Some of the emerging ideas that were heard across themes include:

- The importance of investing in health and strengthening prevention efforts in the region;
- Continued lobbying for improved transport connectivity, including delivering the Ballarat – Melbourne rail line upgrades and funding for a business case for the extension of passenger rail services beyond Ararat;
- Simplify land use & planning;
- Attract, retain and ensure appropriate training is available to maintain & develop our skilled workforce;
- Developing an energy roadmap for the region that maximises the economic and community benefits of investment and innovation in new and renewable energy initiatives in the region;
- Continue to advocate to improve mobile and digital connectivity.

A graphical snapshot of the 2017 Central Highlands Assembly is also attached.



Moving forward

As a Partnership, our role is now to take the messages and learnings from our 2017 Assembly, distil them down into a tangible list of priorities from the region, and present them to the Rural and Regional Ministerial Committee.

Last year, I spoke to that Committee about the need to connect our communities locally, regionally and globally; about investment in a place based approach to primary and preventive health initiatives, about supporting retention, renewal, recruitment and attraction with regard to regional areas and jobs, and about maximising opportunities for investment in new and renewable energy opportunities in our region. I am pleased to say that in this year's Budget in May, the following funding was announced:

- \$45 million to improve digital technology and infrastructure across regional Victoria through the Connecting Regional Communities Fund
- \$1.7 million to re-establish the Victorian Rural Women's Network
- \$150,000 towards developing a business case for the 'Prevention Lab', a new co-designed place based Health initiative to support the region's efforts to improve long term health outcomes for Central Highlands communities
- \$47.8 million to establish a Gov Hub in Ballarat
- \$39 million for Stage two upgrades of the Ballarat line as part of the Regional Rail Revival package, which will see improvements on the Ballarat line as well as an additional 9 services per week between Ararat and Ballarat
- Formation of a Regional Waste to Energy Consultative Group
- \$650K funding for Stage 1 of Hepburn Shire Council's anaerobic digester.

As you can see, our Partnership is already having an impact and our voice is being heard.

The Partnership is also taking forward initiatives to boost Partnership links across all three levels of Government, and business and community to support our priorities.

Ongoing consultation

Though our 2017 Assembly is now behind us, the Partnership is keen to continue the consultation process and ongoing engagement with the community.

With that in mind, our Engage page <https://engage.vic.gov.au/central-highlands> will be open for further comment and we would encourage you to get on the page and let us know your thoughts and ideas and follow up for the region, or email us directly at centralhighlands.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au

Over the course of the next few months, we will look to host further focus groups and working teams to sharpen ideas, progress and identify new priorities and to also hear from groups we feel have been absent from our conversation to date.

We will of course also keep you abreast of announcements relevant to our region, via email and also on our Partnership Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CHRP>

I want to take this opportunity to again thank you for giving of your time in August, whether by attending the Assembly, being involved in our engagement activity, or being active on our Engage page. Each of your views is incredibly valuable in this process and means our region is heard right at the heart of Government.

I look forward to keeping the conversation going,

Regards

George Fong
Chair
Central Highlands Regional Partnership